

ANIMAL WELFARE IN THE AMERICAS

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Summary: Information and comments were received from the Delegates of 22 of the 29 countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas in response to a questionnaire on various aspects of the animal welfare issue.

The results show that the countries consider animal welfare to be an “important” issue. Regarding the degree of importance perceived by livestock producers, industry and consumers concerning the various animal welfare issues, major concerns to the livestock chain in general, are husbandry conditions for poultry and pigs, the control of stray animals and the slaughter of animals for the control and eradication of disease outbreaks. In only four countries is the existing animal welfare legislation based on OIE standards. The institution responsible for disseminating/promoting/harmonising OIE animal welfare guidelines in a number of countries is the Ministry of Agriculture through its Veterinary Services. Most countries state that they have provided training courses on animal welfare for Veterinary Service personnel. In most countries, live animals are transported over distances of less than 300 km, although in some cases cattle are transported over longer distances, and the majority of countries also have regulations on the use of stunning for the humane slaughter of meat animals. However, less than half the countries surveyed have studies on the effects of transportation on product quality or studies on the effectiveness of stunning methods. Twenty of the 22 countries believe that the OIE should continue to set standards on animal welfare and state that the priority issue is that of livestock.

Key words: Americas – animal welfare – slaughter – transportation

Introduction

The OIE has been mandated by all its Member Countries to become the world’s foremost animal welfare organisation. This document compiles the answers of the Delegates of the Member Countries to a questionnaire, and supplements the OIE’s work on animal welfare by providing an overview of knowledge and advances in the field of animal welfare in the Americas.

Methodology

A questionnaire was prepared containing questions on animal welfare in relation to legislation, and questions on the general importance of animal welfare, education, research and dissemination, animal production, the transportation of live animals and the humane slaughter of animals for consumption. In addition, views were requested on OIE activities. Questionnaires were sent to the 29 countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas, to be answered by country Delegates. Replies were received from the 22 countries listed below.

The Delegates did not answer all the questions and, where the answers are expressed as percentages, they refer to the number of answers for that particular item. Only a descriptive analysis is provided on the information collected, either as real numbers or as percentages, to give an overview of the issue and the corresponding advances. Some occasional comments by Delegates are included.

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Member Countries and answers

Argentina	X
Barbados	
Belize	
Bolivia	X
Brazil	X
Canada	X
Chile	X
Colombia	X
Costa Rica	X
Cuba	X
Dominican Republic	X
Ecuador	X
El Salvador	X
France	X
Guatemala	X

Guyana	
Haiti	X
Honduras	X
Jamaica	X
Mexico	X
Nicaragua	
Panama	
Paraguay	X
Peru	X
Suriname	X
Trinidad and Tobago	
United States of America	X
Uruguay	X
Venezuela	

X: Answer received

Results**1. Animal welfare legislation**

Table 1 shows that most of the countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas that answered the questionnaire have no legislation (laws, regulations, standards) on animal welfare, except for companion animals and livestock. In the vast majority of countries, existing or future regulations are drawn up by the competent authority at national/federal level, although in some countries this is also done at provincial/state level. In most cases, the Competent Authority is the Veterinary Service and in some instances, municipal authorities act as the Competent Authority. In only four of the countries with legislation (Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay) are regulations based on OIE standards.

Table 1.– Number of countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas which have or do not have legislation on animal welfare for the types of animals indicated

Type of animal	Legislation exists	No legislation exists
Food production animals	11	11
Companion animals	15	6
Working animals	7	15
Sport/entertainment animals	7	14
Laboratory animals	10	12
Aquatic animals	6	16
Zoo animals	9	13
Circus animals	8	14

The competent authority (generally the Veterinary Administration) oversees compliance with animal welfare regulations at national level, and in some cases with the help of municipal authorities.

Most of the countries surveyed apply sanctions for infringing legislation. These include, according to the degree of severity: fines, temporary suspension or loss of authorisation to have an establishment, loss of licence, total or partial closure of the establishment, confiscation of animals, a ban on owning or keeping animals, detention and imprisonment of the responsible parties.

2. Importance of animal welfare

Concerning the degree of importance attached by the countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas to the animal welfare issue, it should be noted that for the various aspects investigated in Table 2, animal welfare is an 'important' but not a 'very important' issue. More importance is given to animal welfare aspects such as the impact on animal health, the humane handling of animals, trade (requirements of importing countries) and productivity (industrial or production losses). Animal welfare is considered as relatively less important by consumers. Six countries of the 22 surveyed did not consider it to be important.

Table 2.– Degree of importance of various aspects of animal welfare in the various countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas

Aspects	Degree of importance (number of countries)		
	Very important	Important	Unimportant
Impact on animal health	9	9	4
Humane handling of animals	8	13	1
Trade (requirements of the importing countries)	8	11	3
Productivity (industrial or production losses)	7	13	2
Consumer perceptions (increasingly demanding)	4	12	6

A number of countries state that they have conducted surveys on the perceptions of primary producers, industry and consumers regarding animal welfare. Of these, Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and the United States of America (USA) have conducted animal welfare surveys at two or three of these levels (primary producers, industry, consumers). Suriname has conducted surveys only among primary producers, Canada in industry, and France among consumers. The surveys were drawn up by producer associations, animal rights advocacy groups, extended services of the Ministry of Agriculture and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

As regards the degree of importance attached by producers, industry and consumers to the various animal welfare issues, the results show that the issues of general concern to the entire chain are husbandry conditions for poultry and pigs, the control of stray animals and the slaughter of animals for the control and eradication of disease outbreaks. The most important issues in order of priority for each sector are:

- Primary producers: the slaughter of animals for the control and eradication of disease outbreaks, husbandry conditions for certain species such as poultry and pigs, and the control of stray animals.
- Industry: husbandry conditions for certain species such as poultry and pigs, the transportation of animals, the slaughter of animals for the control and eradication of disease outbreaks and the control of stray animals.
- Consumers: the control of stray animals, husbandry conditions for poultry and pigs, animals in captivity (zoos) and also the slaughter of animals for the control and eradication of disease outbreaks.

3. Education, research and dissemination

In answer to the question on whether the countries' Veterinary Services have provided training courses on animal welfare for their own personnel, for producers, industry and consumers, only 2 countries (Ecuador and Guatemala) said that they had not provided any training courses, and 1 (Costa Rica) said that it is preparing training courses. In general, most countries (15) stated that they have provided training courses for their Veterinary Service personnel. Eight countries have also provided training for producers, 7 for private veterinarians, 7 for industry and 2 (Honduras and USA) for consumers.

In most cases (15 countries), courses on animal welfare in veterinary faculties and other educational institutions are only taught as part of other subjects. In 9 countries, there are courses on specific animal welfare subjects (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Haiti, Honduras, Peru and USA). In Canada, Colombia, France and the USA, there are also Masters or Doctorate programmes on animal welfare. Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Haiti and the USA state that they have scientific research funding for animal welfare.

In answer to the question as to which institution is responsible for the dissemination/promotion/harmonisation of OIE animal welfare guidelines, in most countries (16) it is the Ministry of Agriculture. Only Cuba and Mexico stated that the Institute of Veterinary Medicine – Scientific Veterinary Council of Cuba and the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences played a role. The Delegates of Bolivia, Guatemala, Jamaica, Peru and Suriname stated that the OIE animal welfare guidelines have not been disseminated in their countries. In countries where the OIE guidelines have been, or are being disseminated, the most commonly used methods are to set up working groups (commissions) comprising personnel from the institution and private stakeholders (producers, slaughter plants, NGOs and others) that hold extensive seminars on the subject (workshops, courses or other).

A number of countries state that they have used other methods. Costa Rica has developed a programme for beef chain education and evaluation through an agreement between the Livestock Development Corporation¹ and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and its local counterpart, the Global Alliance for Humane Sustainable Development. In Argentina, manuals of good practice have been drawn up jointly with an animal welfare commission which appointed SENASA² as the lead authority. Canada has distributed an electronic version of the guidelines to all the parties involved within both the federal and the provincial government, as well as to private industry. Comments and suggestions have also been requested from the main sectors involved.

4. Animal production

In nearly all countries surveyed, the three most important production animal species are cattle, pigs and poultry. In Haiti and Jamaica, goats are also important; in Argentina, Peru and Uruguay, sheep are important; and in Chile, salmon. An analysis of the production system for each of these species has revealed the following:

- Poultry.— The poultry production system is intensive in all countries, except in Cuba, where it is semi-intensive and in El Salvador, where it is extensive.
- Pigs.— The system of pig production is also intensive in all countries except Peru, where it is semi-intensive, in El Salvador and Honduras, where it is extensive, and in Bolivia, which uses all three systems in similar proportions (intensive, semi-intensive, extensive).
- Cattle.— In the case of cattle, most countries use all three production systems: intensive, semi-intensive and extensive production, in fairly equal proportions. Only the USA differs, where the system of cattle production is basically intensive (90%) and El Salvador, which has a semi-intensive system (100%). Argentina and Brazil have mainly extensive systems (86% and 95% respectively).
- Sheep.— Sheep production systems are basically extensive, with the exception of the USA, which has a 100% intensive system, and Canada and Jamaica, which have semi-intensive systems.
- Goats.— Goat production systems are also mainly extensive. Only the USA has an intensive system of goat production (100%), while Peru (100%) and Canada (90%) have semi-intensive systems. In Cuba, Jamaica and Suriname, goats are produced using all three systems.
- Camelidae.— Camelidae production systems are basically extensive (Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and USA). Only Canada states that it has a 100% semi-intensive camelidae production system, and there is no country which rears camelids intensively.
- Aquatic species.— Aquaculture has basically been considered an intensive production system and fishing an extensive one. Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala and Suriname have mainly intensive systems, while Bolivia, Brazil, Jamaica and the USA have extensive systems.

Approximately half the countries that answered the questionnaire have legislation or guidelines for safeguarding animal welfare during confinement in the production phase, for dairy cows, pigs and poultry.. Only Ecuador, Guatemala and the USA specifically stated that they have no legislation on the welfare of these species during confinement in the production phase. The most abundant legislation is on poultry production (13 countries) and pigs (11 countries). Some countries stated that they also have a code of recommendations (voluntary) for other species, including France, which has recommendations for all intensively reared animals, and Canada, which has them for beef cattle, equidae, goats, deer and bison. Brazil has legislation for animals reared in organic production systems. Cuba stated that it has biosecurity regulations.

In answer to the question on which general aspects are covered by this legislation and/or guidelines, most countries (9 to 13) said that they mainly cover the amount of space and proper facilities and the provision of feed and water—in other words, the basic necessities. Another aspect included in legislation is operator training in handling animals, especially for pigs and poultry. Costa Rica stated that its legislation also includes sanitary and regulatory aspects. Honduras includes special guidelines on programmes for animal handling, vaccination and transportation, Suriname and Canada include transportation and Canada also includes euthanasia. Cuba includes aspects on health, the administration of medicines, vaccinations, control of surroundings, cleaning, and research and assessment of risks to the animal population. Brazil includes environmentally-sustainable waste disposal. In Chile, the guidelines include structural aspects (lighting), handling aspects (feeding, breeding, milking, shearing), considerations on disease risks (surveillance, monitoring, emergency procedures, handling of animals found dead), stunning and slaughter methods, and environmental conditions.

¹ *Corporación de Fomento Ganadero (CORFOGA)*

² *SENASA (Argentina): Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (National Agrifood Health and Quality Service)*

5. Transportation of live animals

Only Bolivia, France, Haiti and Suriname stated that they do not export live animals to other countries. The main species transported and the main means of transport (land, inland waterway, sea and air) used by the other countries figure in Table 3.

Table 3.– The principal animal species transported for export and the principal means of transportation (land, inland waterway, sea and air) in the countries of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas

Country	Species	Means of transport
Argentina	equidae, cattle	sea
Brazil	cattle, buffaloes, aquatic animals, cats and dogs, swine (sporadic), poultry	sea, air, land
Canada	pigs, horses, cows, chickens, exotic animals, companion animals	land, air, sea
Chile	cattle, pigs, equidae, camelidae companion animals	land, air
Colombia	cattle	land
Costa Rica	cattle, poultry, equidae, swine, dogs/cats	land, land/air, air
Cuba	poultry, fish, laboratory mice, various mammals	air
Ecuador	pigs, poultry, shrimps	land for pigs and poultry, air
El Salvador	poultry, reptiles	land and air
Guatemala	cattle, pigs, poultry, equidae, sheep, goats	land
Honduras	dogs, equidae, poultry	air, land/air
Jamaica	dogs and cats (companion animals)	air
Mexico	dogs, cats, exotic poultry, broiler breeders	air
Paraguay	cattle, equidae, dogs, cats	land, air
Peru	alpaca, guinea pigs, rabbits, broiler breeders (chickens, ducks, turkeys), gaited horses, wild animals and birds	air
Uruguay	cattle and sheep	sea
USA	cattle, sheep, day-old chicks, equidae	land, air

In most countries, animals that are transported within the country for sale at livestock fairs usually travel 'short' distances (up to 300 km). Only in Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Paraguay and the USA are they transported over 'long' distances (more than 300 km).

Although most of the Delegates expressed the view that in their countries the treatment of animals in the field, at livestock fairs and during transportation complies with OIE animal welfare standards, a number of Delegates made interesting comments, some of which reflect their concern about certain aspects, as mentioned below:

- Argentina.– There have been favourable changes in cattle treatment in the past two years, thanks to extension activities by SENASA and other institutions including: Chambers of Consignees, the Institute for the Promotion of Argentine Beef (IPCVA¹) and some slaughterhouses, through quality procedures that include good handling practices. Although these changes have reached producers, consignees and industry, they have not reached transporters, rural workers and slaughterhouse workers.
- Canada.– There has been federal legislation on the transportation of animals since 1978.
- Chile.– The official Veterinary Service is concerned about enforcement of the Transport Regulation, via sea, from the southern regions (XI and XII to the north).
- Colombia.– It could be improved in terms of duration and the quality of facilities.
- Cuba.– Although there is no animal welfare legislation, the Veterinary Service has adopted the animal welfare procedures in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*.
- Ecuador.– Priority needs to be given to animal welfare measures where there is no legislation and enforcement is limited.

1 IPCVA: *Instituto de Promoción de la Carne Vacuna Argentina*

- Honduras.– The *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* is used.
- Jamaica.– There is a need to change the legislation to ensure that the National Veterinary Services adopt and implement OIE animal welfare standards.
- Mexico.– Animals shown at fairs are given a privileged classification in production units.
- Paraguay.– There are specific resolutions on transportation. These are: No. 808 (1996), No. 11 (pigs, 1998), No. 12 (pigs, 1998), No. 16 (poultry, 1998), No. 256 (2000), and No. 517 (2001).
- Peru.– The OIE standards are applied in the case of large animals (cattle, equidae) and companion animals.
- Suriname.– There are no livestock fairs in the country.

Only the Delegates of Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti state that the treatment of animals in the field, at livestock fairs and during transportation is inadequate and could be improved.

Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, France, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and the USA replied that the personnel handling animals in the above cases have been trained in animal handling, while Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala and Haiti replied that the personnel had no training.

With regard to the transportation of animals to slaughterhouses, in most countries, animals are taken short distances (up to 300 km) from the producer to the slaughterhouse, especially in the case of pigs and poultry. Cattle are also taken long distances in countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, Peru, and the USA.

The Delegates of Brazil, Chile, Cuba, France, Honduras, Paraguay, Uruguay and the USA stated that scientific studies had been conducted in their countries on the effects of transport periods and conditions on animal welfare and/or product quality. However, the Delegates of Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Peru and Suriname stated that no such studies exist, and the Delegates of Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica and Mexico were not aware whether such studies are being carried out.

6. Humane slaughter of food animals

In answer to the question on whether it is compulsory in their country to use methods to stun animals prior to their slaughter for consumption, 19 countries replied that it is, and only Guatemala and Haiti said that it is not. Regarding the existence of specific regulations/procedures/instructions, the answer was the same. However, in Haiti there appear to be regulations regarding stunning (but presumably they are neither compulsory nor enforced). Although Guatemala is the only country that said it had no regulations for stunning animals destined for consumption, it nevertheless mentioned the stunning methods used for the different species. Although Bolivia stated that stunning is compulsory, it mentioned that only bleeding was applied in all species except cattle, indicating that stunning was probably not applied in all species.

The institutions responsible for overseeing compliance with stunning regulations are as follows:

- Argentina.– The Department Directors of each slaughterhouse. They are accountable to the National Directorate for Agrifood Inspections (DNFA¹) in SENASA.
- Bolivia.– Slaughterhouse managers.
- Brazil.– Animal Products Inspection Department (DIPOA/SDA/MAPA) and the Federal Council of Veterinary Medicine (CFMV²).
- Canada.– Provincial and Federal Veterinary Services.
- Chile.– Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG³).
- Colombia.– ICA⁴ for exports, the Ministry of Social Protection for routine slaughter.
- Costa Rica.– National Animal Health Service (*Servicio Nacional de Salud Animal*).
- Cuba.– Institute of Veterinary Medicine (Instituto de Medicina Veterinaria).
- Ecuador.– SESA⁵, sectional organisations.

1 DNFA: *Dirección Nacional de Fiscalización Agroalimentaria*

2 CFMV: *Conselho Federal de Medicina Veterinária*

3 SAG: *Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero*

4 ICA: *Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario*

5 SESA: *Servicio Ecuatoriano de Sanidad Agropecuaria*

- El Salvador.– Food Safety Division (*División de Inocuidad de Alimentos*).
- France.– The Directorate of Veterinary Services of each *département* (DDSV).
- Honduras.– SENASA¹ (Veterinary Services).
- Jamaica.– Ministry of Health and public health inspectors.
- Mexico.– Meat Technical Unit (*Unidad Técnica de la Carne*) of the MAT.
- Paraguay.– The Inspection Department of the official Veterinary Service.
- Peru.– SENASA².
- Uruguay.– General Livestock Services Directorate (*Dirección General de Servicios Ganaderos*).
- USA.– In-plant Food Safety Inspection Services personnel.

The answers to the question on the most commonly used methods for stunning each animal species (e.g. electronarcosis, concussion, carbon dioxide) were as follows:

- Poultry.– Of the 19 countries that replied, 17 stated that they use electronarcosis, 1 (Mexico) said gas and 1 (Bolivia) uses only bleeding.
- Pigs.– Of the 20 countries that replied, 13 said that electronarcosis is preferred (some also use carbon dioxide and captive bolt) and in 1 (Ecuador), mainly carbon dioxide. In Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras and Peru, concussion is used for pigs. Bolivia and Jamaica stated that they only use bleeding.
- Cattle.– Of the 18 countries that replied, 16 countries use concussion (2 of these, Argentina and Uruguay, also use electronarcosis). Cuba and Mexico use electronarcosis.
- Sheep.– Of the 16 countries that replied, either electronarcosis or concussion is used (or both). In Bolivia, only bleeding is used, meaning there is no prior stunning.
- Goats.– Of the 14 countries that replied, 12 use electronarcosis and concussion using the captive bolt pistol. In the other two (Bolivia and Jamaica), goats are only bled out, meaning there is no prior stunning.
- Camelidae.– Of the 5 countries that replied, 4 stated that they use concussion and 1 (Bolivia) uses only bleeding.
- Other species.– Both Canada and the USA stated that they use either captive bolt pistol or shooting for deer, and electronarcosis or captive bolt for ratites. Brazil said that for fish and frogs, low temperatures are used.

Of the 21 countries that replied to the question as to whether the treatment of animals in their countries' slaughterhouses complies with OIE standards on animal welfare, 15 answered yes (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, France, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and USA). Six countries were of the view that this is not always the case (Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Jamaica), explaining that it is so because of either inadequate training or the non enforcement of corresponding legislation.

In answer to the question on whether there are any scientific studies or assessments on the effectiveness of using these stunning methods in their country, 9 countries stated that studies had been conducted; 6 stated that no studies had been conducted, and the rest did not know.

7. OIE activities

Twenty of the 22 countries that replied to the question said that the OIE should continue to set standards for animal welfare, while 2 of the countries did not reply to this question. In answer to the question on which other issues the OIE should give priority to, the following were suggested, in order of importance:

1. animal production conditions (housing, feed, handling) (a priority for 18 countries),
2. control of stray animals (a priority for 12 countries),
3. sport animals (11 countries consider this a priority),
4. animal fights (9 countries consider this a priority),
5. laboratory animals (7 countries consider this a priority),
6. circus and show animals (6 countries consider this a priority).

¹ SENASA (Honduras): *Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria*

² SENASA (Peru): *Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Agraria*

Other issues raised were the following:

7. ritual slaughter (France),
 8. setting regulatory standards for the production of *foie gras* in ducks and geese using force-feeding methods (Argentina),
 9. organised hunting of animals ('canned hunting') (USA),
 10. the inclusion of aquatic animals (Chile), and
 11. the total ban of animal fights (Suriname).
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